



SUMATRAN ORANGUTAN CONSERVATION PROGRAMME



PanEco



Joint Press Release by PanEco Foundation, Government of Aceh, Forestry Ministry's Natural Resource Conservation Agency (BKSDA), and Yayasan Ekosistem Lestari

New Release Site of Sumatran Orangutan in Aceh Inaugurated

Banda Aceh, March 28, 2011

The Switzerland based international non-government organization, PanEco Foundation, in cooperation with the Indonesian government and an Indonesian non-governmental organization Yayasan Ekosistem Lestari have established a new orangutan release site in Pinus Jantho Nature Reserve, Aceh Besar district of Aceh Province. The inauguration of this release center is held on Monday, March 28, 2011, marked with the arrival of 4 Sumatran orangutans that had been treated at the Quarantine of Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Centre (SOCP) in Batu Mbelin, Deli Serdang North Sumatera, about 1 hour drive from Medan.

The four newly arrived orangutans are confiscated from the local people of Aceh who kept these orangutans illegally. They have been in the quarantine centre that is managed by SOCP together with North Sumatra Natural Resource conservation.

The names of the orangutans arriving in Pinus Jantho on March 28, 2011 are as follows:

Name	Sex	Age	Arrival date at Quarantine	Owner
Sangir	Male	7	29 July 2009	A farmer in Aceh Tenggara
Mongki	Female	6	24 January 2010	Owner of Fuel Station in Nagan Raya
KisKis	Male	6	27 May 2009	A farmer in Aceh Tamiang
Pibi	Female	7	26 October 2008	No data (BKSDA Aceh)

In addition to these 4 individuals, two other orangutans were previously transferred to the new reintroduction centre on March 23, 2011. They are Coconut (male, 6 years old, confiscated in Agusan, Gayo Lues, September 2009) and Eidelweiss (female, adult) rescued from the wild in the Tripa swamp, Nagan Raya, Aceh, where she had become isolated in a few remaining trees in an area being converted to oil palm plantation.

The SOCP and the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry's Natural Resources Conservation Agency (Balai Konservasi Sumber Daya Alam, BKSDA) in Aceh have recently saved four orangutans in Tripa swamp areas where forests continue to be converted to oil palm. Three of these were immediately relocated and released in the only large forest block that remains there, near the coast, but Eidelweiss could not be released immediately at that time due to an injury sustained during capture on 16 December 2011, that required treatment. The quarantine team took care for her in Batu Mblein Quarantine Center before she was finally ready to be released to the wild again, in Janto. Eidelweiss is still wild, and therefore she did not have to go through the laborious process of having to learn to live in the wild again, so she was released in Jantho on March 24, 2011. Coconut is still in one of the cages at the new station in Jantho, awaiting the arrival today of his four close friends from Medan.

After these 6 orangutans have been released, there are about 30 other orangutans in the SOCP Quarantine waiting for to be returned to the forests of Aceh, and these will all eventually be transferred to the new station in Jantho.

Why do we need to reintroduce Sumatran orangutans to the wild?

The Sumatran orangutan (*Pongo abelii*) is a unique species, distinctly different from its relative the Bornean orangutan (*Pongo pygmaeus*). Orangutans are only found in Indonesia and the Malaysia states of Sabah and Sarawak in Borneo. Besides these two islands (Sumatra, and Borneo), there are no other places in the world where wild orangutans are found. Both species are protected by law in Indonesia. Under Law number 5, 1990, Sumatran orangutans may not be captured, killed, kept or traded. Those who violate this law can be sentenced to 5 years in prison and fined of 100 million rupiah (USD 11,111).

The remaining natural population of wild Sumatran orangutans survives only in

the northern part of Sumatra, in the provinces of North Sumatra and Aceh. The largest population of Sumatran orangutans is in an expanse of forest known as the Leuser Ecosystem.

The Sumatran orangutan is listed as Critically Endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Only about 6.600 wild Sumatran orangutans remain in the wild today and the main threat to their survival is the conversion of forests, primarily by timber concessions, and oil palm plantations. In addition to habitat loss, hunting of orangutans also still occurs, and as a result, any surviving infants often end up being kept as illegal pets.

Consequently, the SOCP, namely the PanEcoFoundation, Yayasan Ekosistem Lestari (YEL) in collaboration with the Directorate General of Protection and Nature Conservation (including Natural Resources Conservation Agencies in North Sumatera and Aceh) confiscate these orangutans and return as many as possible to a life in the wild once again. This is also in accordance with the strategy and action plan for conservation of the orangutan of Indonesia in 2007-17, launched by the President of Indonesia in 2007.

Why release it in the Jantho?

Since 2002, the SOCP and Directorate General of Protection and Nature Conservation has returned to the wild more than 120 orangutans, near Bukit Tigapuluh National Park in Jambi province. In 2009, together with the Government of Aceh province we began looking for a suitable site to establish a second, new, reintroduced population of this critically endangered species.

In accordance with the Decree of the Minister of Forestry number 280 year 1995, forests where orangutans can be released should be similar to the original habitat of wild orangutans, must be protected from disturbance (i.e. protected), and must not currently harbour an existing wild orangutan population.

SOCP surveys, and those of several other parties, carried out between 1990-2009 found no existing wild orangutan population in the region of the Pinus Jantho Nature Reserve, despite the fact that the forest is indeed very similar to those elsewhere in Aceh where wild orangutans do occur. Many of the orangutans favoured food tree species are present and the forest is also connected to the larger forest block known as UluMasen. The Pinus Jantho Nature Reserve also benefits from the highest level of protected status there is under Indonesian law and in a letter dated 31st August 2010 the Minister of Forestry himself approved the reintroduction of orangutans into the reserve and the establishment of the new reintroduction station. The SOCP subsequently began construction of the necessary facilities in October 2010. The establishment of the new centre, and the release of orangutans in Jantho was also socialized among local communities surrounding the nature reserve, together with the District government of Aceh Besar, the local NGO known as FORSAKA, and the Ministry of Forestry's Natural Resources Conservation (KSDA) Aceh.

What is the procedure for reintroducing orangutans?

Only healthy orangutans are allowed to be returned to the wild. After illegal pet orangutans are confiscated from their “owner”, the health of each orangutan must be examined in full and each must pass a minimum of a 30 day quarantine period . This process is performed in the orangutan quarantine center at Sibolangit, near Medan. Often, confiscated orangutans have intestinal worms and other parasites, most of which are relatively easily treated. Sometimes they can have more serious problems, such as diseases like hepatitis and TB which they contract from people whilst in captivity, or horrific injuries (machete wounds, gunshot injuries) or disabilities that can prevent them from ever being returned to the wild.

Once shown to be healthy, individual orangutans can then be transferred to a reintroduction centre, such as the SOCP has managed in Jambi since 2002 with the Frankfurt Zoological Society, and now the new centre being opened in Jantho. When the orangutans first arrive in Jantho they will still be housed in cages at the station, but these cages are in the middle of the forest. Before they are fully released to the wild, they need to rest for a few weeks, and specialized staff begin to gradually introduce the orangutans to the various wild foods that can be readily found in the surrounding forest (fruits, leaves, etc.). After these first few weeks, those individual orangutans that can be safely handled, are taken by staff into the forest each morning and returned to the cages again for the night. In this way they can very gradually learn the skills they need, in the relative safety of the centre and under the watchful eyes of the staff. Individual orangutans that are more difficult to handle must sometimes stay longer in the cages, until they are familiar with many more of the forest foods available, before they are released further away from the station.

Once released, it is also important for field staff to monitor the orangutans in the forest, starting every morning when they wake up in their night nest, until the late afternoon when they make a new nest to sleep in. During the day they are followed and field staff collate data such as on their behavior, food intake, social skills, climbing and nest building skills. Only with this monitoring we can know if the orangutans are indeed able to be independent or not, and additional food and other support be provided if needed.

What is the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme, SOCP?

The Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Program (SOCP), is a collaborative program between the Indonesian government (mainly through the Directorate General of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation), PanEco Foundation (Switzerland), Yayasan Ekosistem Lestari (YEL), and the Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) from Germany. SOCP activities cover all aspects of Sumatran orangutan conservation including:

- a) Rescue, quarantine, and re-introduction of captive orangutans to the wild;
- b) Surveys and monitoring of the remaining wild populations;
- c) Research on the conservation and behavioral ecology of wild orangutans;
- d) Conservation of habitats;

e) Conservation Education and Awareness Programme.

Construction of the SOCP's Orangutan Quarantine Centre in Batu Mbelin, Sibolangit, near Medan, was completed in 2002. Since then over 200 orangutans have been received at the quarantine centre and more than 120 of these have already been sent to the SOCP Reintroduction Centre in Jambi. With the new release site in Pinus Jantho, the SOCP currently operates two release sites.

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